

NO. 3 IN THE SERIES - WORDS TO THE CROSS

THE SOLDIERS ALSO MOCKED HIM, COMING UP AND OFFERING HIM VINEGAR, AND SAYING, "IF YOU ARE THE KING OF THE JEWS, SAVE YOURSELF." LUKE 23:36-37.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE ONCE SAID [^{STAGE} ALL THE WORLD'S A XXXX AND ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN MERELY PLAYERS." LIFE IS A DRAMA AND THE MEANING IT HAS FOR US DEPENDS UPON HOW WE PLAY IT.

BUT THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WORD DRAMA AND DRAMATIC. DRAMZ IS A SERIES OF EVENTS HAVING VIVID UNITY AND INTEREST, WHILE TO US THE DRAMATIC SUGGESTS THE SENSATIONAL / THE SPECTACULAR. WE LIVE IN A TIME THAT THRIVES ON THE DRAMATIC, WE ARE CONDITIONED BY WIDE SCREENED MOVIES ~~AND MOVIES~~ AND DRAMATIC HEADLINES. / THE MARK OF A GOOD MOTION PICTURE HAS BECOME THE AMOUNT OF HORSES AND EXTRAS ~~EMPLOYED~~ EMPLOYED IN ITS PRODUCTION. THE ENTERTAINMENT PAGES OF OUR NEWSPAPERS ARE FILLED WITH THE WORDS "STUPENDOUS, COLOSSAL AND EXTRAVAGANZA." THIS FLAIR FOR THE DRAMZTIC HAS INVADED ALL OF LIFE / GLITTERING MOVIE STARS APPEAR AT ALL MAJOR CONVENTIONS. / IN A CHICAGO BALL PARK A SCORE BOARD THAT LIGHTS UP AND FIRE WORKS DISPLAYS MAKE THE GAME MORE EXCITING.]

CHRISTIANITY TOO HAS BECOME A VICTIM OF THIS SURGE. MANY WELL MEANING PERSONS HAVE FALLEN PREY TO THE TEMPTATION TO MAKE THEIR FAITH MORE ATTRACTIVE BY MAKING IT MORE DRAMATIC.

ELABORATE SANCTUARIES, PROVACATIVE LIGHTING, PSYCHOLOGICAL TRICKS / ALL APPEAR HERE AND THERE IN THE CONTEXT WE CALL WORSHIP.

IF ONE OF CHICAGO'S LEADING MINISTERS WERE TO ANNOUNCE THAT NEXT SUNDAY HE
 WOULD PREACH STANDING ON HIS HEAD TO SHOW THAT THE WORLD WAS TOPSY TURVEY, HIS CHURCH
 WOULD BE FILLED, PHOTOGRAPHERS WOULD BE PRESENT, ^{a Curiosity seekers} / IT WOULD DRAW A CROWD. BUT ~~XXXX~~ HE
 TO ANNOUNCE THAT NEXT SUNDAY HE WOULD PREACH ON THE CROSS THE EFFECT WOULD HARDLY
 BE THE SAME.

IN OUR SPECTACULAR*MINDED ERA EVERYTHING IS GEARED TO THE GALLERY, INCLUDING
 SALVATION. IF IT IS NOT DRAMATIC IT WILL NOT SELL. / SO IT BECOMES DRAMATIC. / WE TEND
 TO JUDGE EVERYTHING BY OUR FEELINGS RATHER THAN BY OUR MINDS AND WILLS. THUS WE WANT
 OUR RELIGION TO BE DRAMATIC SO THAT WE CAN FEEL GOOD RATHER THAN BE GOOD, / SO THAT WE CAN
 SEE SOMETHING THAT IS STARTLING RATHER THAN SOMETHING THAT IS QUIET AND DEEP.

LAST SUNDAY WE DISCUSSED THE FIRST OF THE WORDS TO THE CROSS COMING FROM THOSE WHO
 WANTED A CHRIST BUT NO SACRIFICE. ON WEDNESDAY EVENING OUR THINKING WAS PROMPTED BY
 THE THIEF WHO IN SPEAKING TO THE CROSS DEMONSTRATED THAT HE HAD FOUND THE POWER OF NEGATIVE
 THINKING. TODAY I WANT TO TURN TO THE SOLDIERS WHO WERE THERE ON CLAVARY, WHOSE DUTY
 IT WAS TO CARRY OUT THE ROMAN ORDERS OF EXECUTION. / THE SOLDIERS, IN WHAT THEY SAID AND
DID REPRESENT THOSE OF US, WHO WANT OUR RELIGION TO BE DRAMATIC.

THE PRESENCE OF SOLDIERS AT THE CROSS IS EVIDENCE OF ROME'S IRON RULE IN THEIR
PROVINCES. THEY WERE TO SEE THAT NO EXTREME UNAUTHORIZED BRUTALITY WAS INFLICTED, AND
 ALSO TO MAKE SURE NO ONE ATTEMPTED TO RESCUE THE VICTIMS. SOMETIMES MEN ~~XXX~~ WERE TAKEN

DOWN BY A GROUP OF DARING FRIENDS AND REVIVED FROM THEIR WOUNDS. THESE SOLDIERS WERE NOT JEWS OR CITIZENS OF CONQUERED ISRAEL: THEY WERE THE PROUD LEGIONNAIRES OF THE LOUD*SCREAMING EAGLE OF ROME. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WAS THE PEROGATIVE OF THE ROMANS, AND WAS CARRIED OUT BY A DETAIL OF THE GOVENER'S SPECIAL GUARD. / MATTHEW TELLS US THAT WHEN THEY HAD FINISHED THEIR MORBID TASK THEY SAT DOWN AND KEPT WATCH OVER HIM.

BUT INSTEAD OF BEING IMPRESSED BY THE DIVINE LOVE THAT SUFFERED THERE BEFORE THEM, THE SOLDIERS WERE WHOLLY UNCONCERNED AS THEY WATCHED JESUS DIE. SITTING THERE LOOKING AT JESUS THEY REFERRED TO HIM MOCKINGLY AS THE KING OF THE JEWS. THEY THOUGHT THAT ALL GODS WERE NATIONAL GODS. ROME HAD HER GODS, BABYLON HAD GODS, THE MEDES AND THE PERSIANS HAD GODS OF THEIR OWN TOO: AND THE IMPLICATION WAS THAT OF ALL THE NATIONAL GODS NONE SEEMED POORER OR WEAKER THAN THE GOD OF ISRAEL WHO COULD NOT SAVE HIMSELF FROM THIS HIDEOUS HUMILIATION.

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING STILL MORE SIGNIFICANT IN THEIR MOCKING; THESE MEN WERE SENSA* TIONALISTS, LOVERS OF THE SPECTACULAR WHO EXPECTED RELIGION TO BE DRAMATIC, / AS DRAMATIC AS THE UNLOOSENING OF FETTERS AND OF TURNING A CROSS INTO A THRONE. / IN THEIR EYES A GOD COULD JUSTIFY HIMSELF ONLY BY DOING A STUNT, BY BEING DRAMATIC: THEY WANTED A LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST AS HOLLYWOOD MIGHT PORTRAY IT. THAT IS WHY THEY MOCKINGLY ASKED JESUS TO COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS. THEY WANTED AN INCIDENT THAT WOULD MAKE THEM SAY AH IN WONDER / AS THEY SAW IT: / RATHER THAN THAT WHICH WOULD MAKE THEM SAY "I BELIEVE," WHEN

THEIR MINDS, UNDER THE GRACE OF GOD, KNEW IT. THEY EXPECTED RELIGION TO BE COLOSSAL
AND DRAMATIC. IN EFFECT THEY WERE SAYING "IF YOU ARE TRULY THE CHRIST PROVE IT--
DO SOMETHING DRAMATIC LIKE COMING DOWN FROM THAT CROSS." AND WHEN JESUS DID NOT DO
JUST THAT THEY WERE SO BORED THAT THEY SAT DOWN AND GAMBLING TO SEE WHO WOULD GET HIS
 GARMENTS.

THERE, WITHIN A STONES THROW OF THEM WAS BEING ENACTED THE DRAMA OF REDEMPTION,
 BUT FOR THEM IT WAS NOT DRAMATIC ENOUGH. AS WE PICTURE THIS GROUP OF MEN, MOCKING
OUR SUFFERING LORD, UNDAUNTED BY THE EVENT THAT WAS OCCURRING WE DO WELL TO EXAMINE
OURSELVES TO SEE IF WE TOO HAVE NOT BECOME HARDENED TO DRAMA AS WE SEARCH FOR THE
DRAMATIC.

TO BEGIN WITH THESE PEOPLE EXPECTED RELIGION TO BE DRAMATIC AND CONSEQUENTLY THEY
MISSED GOD, FOR THE VERY REASON THAT HE IS NOT DRAMATIC. / IN A SENSE NO ONE IS AS
UNSENSATIONAL, AS UNDRAMATIC AS GOD.

TWO EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET ELIJAH CLEARLY POINT OUT HOW GOD WORKS
 IN WAYS THAT ARE COMMON PLACE. A HIGHLY RESPECTED AND IMPORTANT COMMANDER OF THE SYRIAN
ARMY CALLED NAMAAN CAME TO ELIJAH TO BE CURED OF THE LEPROSY HE HAD CONTRACTED. BEING

A COMMANDER HE WAS A DRAMATIC MAN: HE HAD WHAT COULD BE CALLED A DRAMATIC DISEASE AND HE WANTED A DRAMATIC CURE. SO THAT WHEN ELIJAH TOLD HIM MERELY TO GO WASH IN THE JORDAN HE WAS DISGUSTED AT SUCH A SIMPLE COMMON SUGGESTION AND IGNORED THE PROPHETS ADVICE. HE WANTED A SENSATIONAL ACT OF GOD THAT COULD BE SEEN AND FELT AND THAT WOULD IMPRESS HIM AND ALL THE ONLOOKERS. SOME OF HIS SERVANTS APPEALED TO HIM REMINDING HIM THAT HE HAD NOTHING TO LOSE BY TRYING THE PROPHETS SUGGESTION. SO NAMAAN WENT TO THE JORDAN AND BATHED AND WAS CURED. HOW UNDRAMATIC A PROCEDURE, HOW UNSENSATIONAL BUT NEVERTHE* LESS HE FOUND HEALTH.

AT ANOTHER POINT IN ELIJAH'S LIFE HE SERVES AS AN AGENT OF GOD'S QUIET AND UNDRA* MATIC WAYS. ELIJAH WAS TOLD THAT HIS LIFE WAS IN DANGER AT THE HANDS OF KING AHAB AND HIS QUEEN JEZEBEL SO HE WENT INTO HIDING IN A CAVE IN MOUNT HOREB. JUST AS THE PROPHET REACHED THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE A WILD TROPICAL STORM OCCURED AND HE THOUGHT THAT THE STORM'S WILD THRASHINGS WERE PERHAPS THE VOICE OF GOD TELLING HIM SOMETHING: BUT HE COULD MAKE NOTHING OF IT. | THE RAIN SUBSIDED ONLY TO TURN INTO A VISCIOUS EARTH QUAKE, SURELY THIS WAS A DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S POWER. AND THEN THE SKY WAS LIGHTED UP BY BLIMING FLASHES OF LIGHTNING THIS MUST BE THE GLORY OF THE LORD REVEALED HE THOUGHT. BUT WHEN THE STORM HAD PASSED AND THE EARTHQUAKE STILLED, WHEN THE CONVULSIONS HAD TURNED TO CALM AND ALL THE SPECTACULAR, DRAMATIC AND SENSATIONAL WERE GONE, THEN IN THE UNOBTRUSIVE, STILL

SMALL VOICE GOD MET ELIJAH. HE CAME IN QUIETNESS, IN THE STILL AND CALM NOT IN THUNDER AND LIGHTENING.

OR AGAIN WE SEE A GENTLE YOUNG WOMEN KNOCKING ON AN INN DOOR IN BETHLEHEM AND BEING TOLD THERE WAS NO ROOM. SO SHE ENTERS IN A STABLE AND THERE HER CHILD IS BORN. IT WAS REALLY GOD'S ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD AND IT WAS MADE WITH SUCH SIMPLICITY. / "HOW SILENTLY, HOW SILENTLY, THE WONDROUS GIFT IS GIVEN" / HOW UNDRAMATIC GOD CAN BE!

A TAX COLLECTOR WAS SEATED AT HIS TABLE COUNTING HIS MONEY AND A PASSER BY FROM GALILEE CALLS TO HIM "FOLLOW ME." IT WAS UNDRAMATIC, BUT MATTHEW, THROUGH THIS CALL, BECAME AN APOSTLE. / NO HEADLINES, TO STORMY CONVERSION, NOTHING DRAMATIC / JUST A CONVERSATION.

SO FREQUENTLY WE MISS THE CHRIST, / JUST LIKE THE ROMAN SOLDIERS, / BECAUSE WE EXPECT RELIGION TO BE DRAMATIC. SALVATION IS NOT SENSATIONAL, FAITH IS NOT ALL EMOTION. WE CAN SIT IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS, AS DID THE SOLDIERS, AND STILL MISS ITS MEANING.

THIS BEING TRUE, IT FOLLOWS THAT UNLIKE THE SOLDIER, WE OUGHT TO LOOK FOR GOD IN THE COMMON PLACE AND THE UNDRAMATIC. THIS IS A DIFFICULT LESSON FOR US TO LEARN, THAT GOD IS IN THE GENERAL, EVERYDAY INFLUENCES THAT ARE AROUND US / IN THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE LIVE, IN THE STILL SMALL VOICE THAT IS AUDIBLE ONLY TO US, IN DAILY EXPERIENCES.

ONE OF THE GREAT FACTS ABOUT JESUS WAS THAT HE HAD THE ABILITY TO SEE GOD IN THE COMMON PLACE AND SINCE THEN MEN HAVE HAD THEIR EYES OPENED TO VALUES LONG HIDDEN FROM SIGHT. FOR INSTANCE IN A BUSTLING CROWD OF PEOPLE JESUS STOPPED TO OBSERVE SOME CHILDREN AT PLAY. HE LINGERED ONCE TO TALK TO A WOMAN WHO WAS A SOCIAL OUTCAST: AND ANOTHER TIME HE PAUSED IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY TO REMARK UPON SOME WILD LILLIES. ONCE HE STOOD BY THE TEMPLE TREASURY WHILE PERSONS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE GAVE THEIR GIFTS AND HE COMMENTED ON AN ELDERLY WIDOW AND HER SMALL OFFERING. THESE WERE UNDRAMATIC, EVERYDAY AFFAIRS AND YET IN THEM JESUS CHRIST WAS ABLE TO POINT OUT TO HIS FOLLOWERS DEEP AND BEAUTIFUL MEANING, GOODNESS AND VALUE THAT BEFORE HADN'T SEEMED TO BE THERE.

SOMETIME, IF YOU HAVE NEVER DONE SO, YOU OUGHT TO MAKE THIS EXPERIMENT. STOP IN A CHURCH AND SIT THERE FOR AHALF AN HOUR OR SO, AND MAKE YOURSELF THINK ABOUT NOTHING BUT THE CROSS. WITHOUT A SERMON, OR HYMNS, OR ORGAN OR RITUAL, JUST SIT AND THINK ABOUT CALVARY'S CROSS. I ASSURE YOU, YOU WILL EMERGE FROM THIS EXPERIENCE WITH RENEWED FAITH IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

GOD WALKS INTO OUR SOULS WITH SILENT STEPS: NOT IN A CATASTROPHIC, DRAMATIC HOLT FROM THE BLUE, BUT IN THE QUIET WHEN OUR MIND IS CALM AND OPEN TO HIM. ONLY THEN CAN WE HEAR THE STILL SMALL VOICE, ONLY THEN CAN WE KNOW THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE.

IF WE REALIZE THAT GOD MAY BE FOUND IN THE COMMONPLACE, WE ALSO OUGHT TO KNOW THAT TRUE RELIGION IS NOT DRAMATIC EITHER. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REALIZE THIS BECAUSE

OUR TIME LITERALLY THRIVES ON THE DRAMATIC. A FLAIR FOR THE DRAMATIC CAN BE SEEN IN
OUR DRESS, IN OUR AUTOMOBILES, OUR HOUSES AS WELL AS OUR ENTERTAINMENT.

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK THE FAMOUS N.Y. PREACHER TELLS US A STORY ABOUT AN ENGLISH
CLERGYMAN WHO VISITED THE UNITED STATES AT THREE DIFFERENT INTERVALS, AND HE CAME TO
THREE DIFFERENT CONCLUSIONS ABOUT WHAT CONSTITUTED THE MAJOR PASSION OF AMERICANS.
AFTER ONE VISIT HE THOUGHT THIS PASSION WAS POWER. AFTER THE SECOND HE THOUGHT IT WAS
WEALTH: AND AFTER THE THIRD HE WAS SURE THAT IT WAS SPEED. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THIS
MAN JUST ABOUT HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD: FOR WHETHER ON LAND OR SEA: IN THE AIR OR
IN SPACE: OR JUST DRIVING TO THE STORE, THE TOWERING FACT AMONG US IS ACCELERATION. IN
THE MIDST OF THIS KIND OF SITUATION, IT TAKES FINE CHARACTER TO REMEMBER THAT THE REAL
MEANING IN LIFE COMES FROM THE QUIET SMALL THINGS.

GOD SHOWS HIS GREATEST POWER AS HE WORKS IN SILENCE. NOISELESSLY THE PLANETS MOVE IN
THEIR ORBITS. THE PSALMIST REALIZED THIS WHEN HE WROTE "THERE IS NO SPEECH NOR ARE
THERE WORDS: THEIR VOICE IS NOT HEARD" AS THEY SWEEP THROUGH THEIR APPOINTED PATHS.
(PS. 19:3) WITH THE ADVENT OF SPRING NEW LIFE PUSHES ITS WAY UP THROUGH THE GROUND AND
BLOSSOMS INTO BEAUTY AND THERE IS NO CLAP OF THUNDER / NOTHING DRAMATIC. EVERY MORNING
AS OUR EARTH TURNS EVER SO QUIETLY, ON ITS AXIS, WE ARE EXPOSED TO AN UNIMAGINEABLE SOURCE

OF RAW ENERGY--THERE IS NOTHING SPECTACULAR ABOUT THE RISING OF THE SUN.

WILLIAM JAMES THE NOTED AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER ONCE SAID, [TRUE RELIGION IS WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR QUIET MOMENTS.] ALTHOUGH THIS IS NOT ALTOGETHER VALID IT DOES POINT TO THE IMPORTANCE OF LOOKING FOR MEANING IN THE UNDRAMATIC.

A GOOD DEAL OF OUR CULTURE'S PROBLEMS SEEM TO STEM BACK TO THIS THIRST FOR EXCITEMENT AND SENSATIONALISM. WE SIMPLY HAVE MISSED THE ALL IMPORTANT SIGNIFICANCE THAT CAN BE FOUND IN STILLNESS. AN EASTERN GIRL MURDERS HER FATHER, MOTHER AND TWO BROTHERS AND EXPLAINS HER ACTIONS AS AN ATTEMPT TO DO SOMETHING EXCITING. YOUNG PEOPLE WRECK THEIR SCHOOLS AND SPEED IN AUTOMOBILES, YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE DESCRUTE SYNAGOGUES AND ADORN WALLS WITH SWASTIKA'S, / OUR PRIMARY DRIVE SEEMS TO BE TO DO SOMETHING EXCITING, TO GET A THRILL / FOR KICKS.

I TRUST THAT WE DO NOT GO TO THESE EXTREMES BUT IN A SMALL WAY EACH ONE OF US SHARES IN THIS STRIVING FOR EXCITEMENT: / WE ALL HARBOR THE SOLDIER'S REQUEST THAT RELIGION BE DRAMATIC.

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS / OR QUAKERS / AS THEY ARE BETTER KNOWN ARE A CONSTANT REMINDER TO US OF THE TRUE NATURE OF GOD. THE CRUX OF THEIR FAITH IS IN AN INNER FLAME AND POWER WHICH COMES / NOT THROUGH THE DRAMATIC AND THE SPECTACULAR, BUT THROUGH THE QUIET WHEN THE

SPECTACULAR AND THE BIGNESS OF LIFE RETIRE, AND THE "STILL SMALL VOICE OF CALM" SPEAKS
THROUGH THE STORM.

THROUGHOUT HIS MINISTRY JESUS FOUND STRENGTH AND POWER IN PERIODS OF RESTFUL QUIET.

GETHSEMENE
IN THE STILLNESS OF GETHSEMENE HE FOUND THE DETERMINATION TO CARRY OUT HIS MISSION,
AND AS THE EXCITEMENT ON CALVARY LULLED, HE HUNG THERE ALONE IN QUIET; UNDRAMATIC
AGONY AND DIED THAT WE MIGHT LIVE.

LET US NOT SHUT GOD OUT OF OUR LIVES BY BEING IMMUNE TO THE STILL SMALL VOICE,
AS WE DRAW CLOSER TO EASTER LET US TRY ANEW TO HEAR GOD IN THE UNDRAMATIC LET US
NOT, LIKE THE SOLDIERS, SIT IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS AND FAIL TO SEE ITS SIGNIFICANCE.